

No Snags Foreseen At New Stadium Site

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An environmental cleanup and a search for unexploded munitions from World War II are not expected to pose any obstacles to building a football stadium on an East Hartford site, the latest location eyed for the project.

Less than 10 percent of Pratt & Whitney's Rentschler Field, the company's former airport, has scattered oil and solvent contamination, which the company expects to finish cleaning up next year, said Pratt spokesman Gary Minor.

The 75 acres being eyed for a University of Connecticut football stadium have no environmental problems, and the company will guarantee that, Minor said.

"Any environmental problems that do exist on Rentschler Field will be remediated and will not impede plans for a stadium," he said.

Meanwhile, as development plans on the Hartford side of the Connecticut River undergo yet another reconfiguration, results of environmental testing of the contamination there still have not been submitted to the Department of Environmental Protection — more than four months after the information was initially supposed to be in.

"We have no data," said DEP spokesman Matt Fritz.

The stadium originally was proposed for the Hartford site.

United Technologies Corp. has offered to donate the 75 acres of Pratt's Rentschler Field to the state for the stadium. It would be the home field for UConn.

A few thousand square feet of the old airfield known as the Klondike area, along the eastern end near East Hartford High School, has been the focus of an environmental cleanup that Pratt began in 1994.

"We've had environmental investigations on that site for years," UTC Chairman George David said

Thursday. "There was a small amount of cleanup that had to be done. We did it a few years ago."

David was referring to the removal of beryllium-contaminated soil. But there is still more cleanup work to be done, focusing on soil and groundwater tainted with oil and solvents, Minor said.

Beryllium, a rare metallic element that is linked to lung cancer and skin irritations, was left in the soil and in the sediment of a man-made pond and unnamed stream when that part of Rentschler was a testing ground for experimental rocket engines in the early 1960s. The beryllium was part of the fuel mixture.

Minor said there are two sites within the airfield where the stadium could be built, and neither one has any contamination problems. He would not pinpoint the locations.

As part of a project to clear old military sites of undiscovered hazards, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in January said it was reviewing records to determine whether any unexploded World War II-era bombs are buried at the airfield. No corps official on the project was available Friday at the agency's New England office in Concord, Mass.

During the war, the airfield was a temporary base for fighter planes and housed an anti-aircraft battery.

Minor said Pratt conducted an extensive search of the land for old bombs and found none. Records give no indication of any buried ordnance, he said.

Michael Harder, a director in the DEP's water management bureau, said his agency and the company are working on plans to clean up PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, from sediment in a pond off the southern end of the former airfield.

"We had issued a [notice of violation] on that. They've hired a consultant and they're looking into it," he said.

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